

## **FAIRFAX COUNTY - DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY SERVICES PROPOSED WEST COUNTY FAMILY SHELTER**

The Homeless Oversight Committee, in their Annual Message to the Board of Supervisors, recommended that a fourth family shelter be constructed to address the critical shortage of shelter beds for families. Pursuant to this recommendation, staff from the Department of Family Services in conjunction with staff from the Department of Housing and Community Development and the Facilities Management Division have developed a proposal for the construction of a fourth family emergency housing facility.

### **PROPOSED NEW SHELTER WILL:**

- Serve families with minor children **only**
- 60-bed facility with the capacity to serve up to 20 homeless families at a given time. (Average length of stay in our current family shelters is approximately 90 days.)
- Help alleviate the use of motels as an alternative to shelter and will address the critical need for emergency shelter for homeless families.
- Be operated under the same general operating procedures as are currently in place in the County's three other family shelters.

### **CURRENT SHELTER OPERATIONS:**

- County emergency shelters are operated under contract with non-profit organizations in the community.
- The Department of Family Services is responsible for the oversight of the shelter operations and administration of shelter contracts. The County is also responsible for maintenance and repair of the shelter facilities.
- **Non-profit shelter operators** provide the following:
  - safe emergency housing
  - supervision and oversight of shelter activities 24 hours a day, seven days a week
  - meals, clothing and other assistance for shelter residents
  - comprehensive training for shelter staff
  - social work and intensive case management services to all shelter residents which includes:
    - supportive counseling
    - development and implementation of a service plan to address the issues that contributed the family's homelessness
    - referral to and coordination of services provided by public and private agencies
    - housing counseling and referral to appropriate housing resources
- **County supportive services** for shelter residents include Social Worker liaison services provided by the Department of Family Services, health services provided on-site by Health Department public health nurses and other appropriate services as needed.
- Upon entering the shelter families must agree to abide by house rules. Rules included an evening curfew, maintaining a clean and neat living area, no alcohol or substance abuse, continuous supervision of children and more.

- While in the shelter, families are expected to follow a service plan which may include:
  - Learning parenting skills, participating in a life skills program
  - Attending job readiness training or maintaining job they have,
  - Arranging for reliable transportation
  - Enrolling children into day care program
  - Participation in therapeutic programs

### **WHO ARE HOMELESS FAMILIES?**

- Families become homeless for a variety of reasons:
  - Loss of a job
  - Divorce or separation
  - Domestic Violence
  - Medical Issues
  - High Cost of Housing- Average two-bedroom rent was \$1,219 in January 2002.
- Most, but not all, are single parent families
- Average size of a homeless family is 3.5 persons
- Approximately one third of the families in shelters are employed. If unemployed, they participate in job search and/or job training activities once they enter the shelter
- Families in shelter are working toward becoming self sufficient

### **WHY IS A NEW SHELTER NEEDED?**

- Currently, the County has three family shelters with a total of 119 beds available for families; Embury Rucker Shelter located in Reston, Shelter House located in Falls Church, and Mondloch II located in the southern region of the County.
- The County's shelters can only accommodate about 30-35 families at one time. It may take three to four months for a family to get into a shelter.
- No new shelter beds for families have been added in the past 10 years,
- The waiting list for the family shelters has averaged over 60 families since Spring of 1999.
- Families with no resources may be placed in a motel. Use of motels is an expensive and undesirable alternative to shelter, but may be the only option available in a crisis.
- Homelessness has increased 25 percent in the past five years from 1,658 total homeless in 1998 to 2,067 in 2002
- A survey conducted on January 24, 2002, of all known homeless county residents identified 2,067 total homeless population of which:
  - 782 (38%) are individuals with no children living with them
  - 1,285 (62%) are persons in families with children under age 18
  - 41% of the homeless population are homeless children.